

¹ The Clerk is DIRECTED to modify to the docket to reflect that Murphy is currently confined at the Bledsoe County Correctional Complex in Pikeville, Tennessee. See <https://apps.tn.gov/foil-app/results.jsp>.

I. THE COMPLAINT

Murphy alleges that on February 13, 2015, he was in protective custody at the WTSP in Unit 8A, Cell 15, under the supervision of Defendants Smith, Colvin, and DeBerry when he was stabbed by his cellmate, inmate Campbell. (ECF No. 1 at 4.) Murphy contends that he had continuously complained, via letters, request forms, and grievances, to Defendants Holloway, Dickerson, and Yager that his cellmate was threatening him and said he was going to cut Murphy's throat, but his complaints had not led to any change. (*Id.*) Murphy alleges that he is an elderly inmate with physical disabilities and that he had previously been robbed of his commissary and appliances, which was what prompted Murphy's placement in protective custody. (*Id.*) Murphy contends the assailant who stabbed him was friends with or part of the gang who assaulted and robbed him prior to his being moved to protective custody. (*Id.*)

Murphy alleges the Defendants acted with deliberate indifference when they placed a known gang member, who was affiliated with the same group that previously assaulted Murphy, in his cell and then largely ignored Murphy when he tried to assert his right to be protected from harm. (*Id.*) He further alleges that after he was stabbed and taken to the clinic, inmate Campbell was merely moved across the hall into Unit 8B, which still gave him access to Murphy's cell because Defendants Smith and Colvin allegedly allowed the inmates from Unit 8B to go into Unit 8A and vice versa. (*Id.* at 5.) Defendant DeBerry was the Unit 8A Pod officer during this time frame and, knowing that Campbell had assaulted Murphy, DeBerry still allowed Campbell access to Unit 8A, where Campbell continued to make threats to kill Murphy. (*Id.* at 6.)

Murphy further alleges that Defendants were made aware of the continuing danger and threats of violence by Campbell via the grievance he filed on April 22, 2015. (*Id.* at 4-5.) Defendant Gilbert attempted to sweep Murphy's complaints "under the rug" by finding the

grievance was inappropriate on May 28, 2015. (*Id.* at 5.) Murphy argues that since Defendant Gilbert is the grievance chairperson, he has a duty to process and respond to complaints filed but has failed to do so. (*Id.*) Additionally, Defendant Holloway allegedly knows the procedures and policies at the WTSP, but has done nothing to rectify the wrongs. (*Id.*)

Murphy seeks compensation for his physical and mental anguish as well as punitive damages because he continues to suffer from blurred vision and migraines. (*Id.* at 7.)

II. ANALYSIS

A. Screening and Standard

The Court is required to screen prisoner complaints and to dismiss any complaint, or any portion thereof, if the complaint—

- (1) is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted; or
- (2) seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.

28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b); see also 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

In assessing whether the complaint in this case states a claim on which relief may be granted, the court applies the standards under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), as stated in *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 677-79 (2009), and in *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555-57 (2007). *Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470-71 (6th Cir. 2010). “Accepting all well-pleaded allegations in the complaint as true, the Court ‘consider[s] the factual allegations in [the] complaint to determine if they plausibly suggest an entitlement to relief.’” *Williams v. Curtin*, 631 F.3d 380, 383 (6th Cir. 2011) (quoting *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 681) (alteration in original). “[P]leadings that . . . are no more than conclusions . . . are not entitled to the assumption of truth. While legal conclusions can provide the framework of a complaint, they must be supported by factual allegations.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679; see also *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at

555 n.3 (“Rule 8(a)(2) still requires a ‘showing,’ rather than a blanket assertion, of entitlement to relief. Without some factual allegation in the complaint, it is hard to see how a claimant could satisfy the requirement of providing not only ‘fair notice’ of the nature of the claim, but also ‘grounds’ on which the claim rests.”).

“A complaint can be frivolous either factually or legally. Any complaint that is legally frivolous would *ipso facto* fail to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.” *Hill*, 630 F.3d at 470 (citing *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325, 328-29 (1989)).

Whether a complaint is factually frivolous under §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) is a separate issue from whether it fails to state a claim for relief. Statutes allowing a complaint to be dismissed as frivolous give “judges not only the authority to dismiss a claim based on an indisputably meritless legal theory, but also the unusual power to pierce the veil of the complaint’s factual allegations and dismiss those claims whose factual contentions are clearly baseless.” *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327, 109 S. Ct. 1827 (interpreting 28 U.S.C. § 1915). Unlike a dismissal for failure to state a claim, where a judge must accept all factual allegations as true, *Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. at 1949-50, a judge does not have to accept “fantastic or delusional” factual allegations as true in prisoner complaints that are reviewed for frivolousness. *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327-28, 109 S. Ct. 1827.

Id. at 471.

“*Pro se* complaints are to be held ‘to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers,’ and should therefore be liberally construed.” *Williams*, 631 F.3d at 383 (quoting *Martin v. Overton*, 391 F.3d 710, 712 (6th Cir. 2004)). *Pro se* litigants and prisoners are not exempt from the requirements of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. *Wells v. Brown*, 891 F.2d 591, 594 (6th Cir. 1989); *see also Brown v. Matauszek*, No. 09-2259, 2011 WL 285251, at *5 (6th Cir. Jan. 31, 2011) (affirming dismissal of *pro se* complaint for failure to comply with “unique pleading requirements” and stating “a court cannot ‘create a claim which [a plaintiff] has not spelled out in his pleading’”) (quoting *Clark v. Nat’l Travelers Life Ins. Co.*, 518 F.2d 1167, 1169 (6th Cir. 1975)) (alteration in original); *Payne v. Sec’y of Treas.*, 73 F. App’x 836, 837 (6th Cir. 2003) (affirming *sua sponte* dismissal of complaint pursuant to Fed. R.

Civ. P. 8(a)(2) and stating, “[n]either this court nor the district court is required to create Payne’s claim for her”); *cf. Pliler v. Ford*, 542 U.S. 225, 231 (2004) (“District judges have no obligation to act as counsel or paralegal to *pro se* litigants.”); *Young Bok Song v. Gipson*, 423 F. App’x 506, 510 (6th Cir. 2011) (“[W]e decline to affirmatively require courts to ferret out the strongest cause of action on behalf of *pro se* litigants. Not only would that duty be overly burdensome, it would transform the courts from neutral arbiters of disputes into advocates for a particular party. While courts are properly charged with protecting the rights of all who come before it, that responsibility does not encompass advising litigants as to what legal theories they should pursue.”).

B. § 1983 Claim

Murphy filed his complaint on the court-supplied form for actions under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 which provides:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory or the District of Columbia, subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress, except that in any action brought against a judicial officer for an act or omission taken in such officer's judicial capacity, injunctive relief shall not be granted unless a declaratory decree was violated or declaratory relief was unavailable. For the purposes of this section, any Act of Congress applicable exclusively to the District of Columbia shall be considered to be a statute of the District of Columbia.

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege two elements: (1) a deprivation of rights secured by the “Constitution and laws” of the United States (2) committed by a defendant acting under color of state law. *Adickes v. S.H. Kress & Co.*, 398 U.S. 144, 150 (1970).

The complaint contains no factual allegations against Defendant Buchannan. When a complaint fails to allege any action by a defendant, it necessarily fails to “state a claim for relief that is plausible on its face.” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570.

Murphy’s claims against Defendants Holloway, Dickerson, and Yager appear to be due to their supervisory roles. Under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, “[g]overnment officials may not be held liable for the unconstitutional conduct of their subordinates under a theory of *respondeat superior*.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 676; *see also Bellamy v. Bradley*, 729 F.2d 416, 421 (6th Cir. 1984). Thus, “a plaintiff must plead that each Government-official defendant, through the official’s own official actions, violated the Constitution.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 676.

There must be a showing that the supervisor encouraged the specific instance of misconduct or in some other way directly participated in it. At a minimum, a § 1983 plaintiff must show that a supervisory official at least implicitly authorized, approved or knowingly acquiesced in the unconstitutional conduct of the offending subordinates.

Bellamy, 729 F.2d at 421 (citation omitted). A supervisory official, who is aware of the unconstitutional conduct of his subordinates, but fails to act, generally cannot be held liable in his individual capacity. *Grinter v. Knight*, 532 F.3d 567, 575-76 (6th Cir. 2008); *Gregory v. City of Louisville*, 444 F.3d 725, 751 (6th Cir. 2006); *Shehee v. Luttrell*, 199 F.3d 295, 300 (6th Cir. 1999); *Lillard v. Shelby Cnty. Bd. of Educ.*, 76 F.3d 716, 727-28 (6th Cir. 1996). A failure to take corrective action in response to an inmate grievance or complaint does not supply the necessary personal involvement for § 1983 liability. *See George v. Smith*, 507 F.3d 605, 609-10 (7th Cir. 2007) (“Ruling against a prisoner on an administrative complaint does not cause or contribute to the [constitutional] violation. A guard who stands and watches while another guard beats a prisoner violates the Constitution; a guard who rejects an administrative complaint about a completed act of misconduct does not.”). Defendants Holloway, Dickerson, and Yager

cannot be sued merely because they failed to take action in response to Murphy's letters, request forms and grievances.

The participation of Defendant Gilbert, the grievance board chairman, in investigating, processing, or denying the grievance Plaintiff filed in April 2015 also cannot in itself constitute sufficient personal involvement to state a claim of constitutional dimension. *Simpson v. Overton*, 79 Fed. Appx. 117, 2003 WL 22435653 (6th Cir. 2003); *see also Martin v. Harvey*, 14 Fed. Appx. 307, 2001 WL 669983, at *2 (6th Cir. 2001) ("The denial of the grievance is not the same as the denial of a request to receive medical care."). Section 1983 liability may not be imposed against a defendant for "a mere failure to act" based upon information contained in the grievance. *See Shehee*, 199 F.3d at 300; *Lillard v. Shelby County Bd. of Educ.*, 76 F.3d 716, 727-28 (6th Cir. 1996).

Murphy's claim that the Defendants failed to protect him from the attack by Campbell arises under the Eighth Amendment, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishments. *See generally Wilson v. Seiter*, 501 U.S. 294 (1991). An Eighth Amendment claim consists of both objective and subjective components. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 834 (1994); *Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 8 (1992); *Wilson*, 501 U.S. at 298; *Williams v. Curtin*, 631 F.3d at 383; *Mingus v. Butler*, 591 F.3d 474, 479-80 (6th Cir. 2010). The objective component requires that the deprivation be "sufficiently serious." *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834; *Hudson*, 503 U.S. at 8; *Wilson*, 501 U.S. at 298. To satisfy the objective component of an Eighth Amendment claim, a prisoner must show that he "is incarcerated under conditions posing a substantial risk of serious harm," *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834; *see also Miller v. Calhoun Cnty.*, 408 F.3d 803, 812 (6th Cir. 2005), or that he has been deprived of the "minimal civilized measure of life's necessities," *Wilson*, 501 U.S. at 298 (quoting *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 347 (1981)); *see also Hadix*

v. Johnson, 367 F.3d 513, 525 (6th Cir. 2004). “The Supreme Court has held that ‘prison officials have a duty . . . to protect prisoners from violence at the hands of other prisoners.’” *Bishop v. Hackel*, 636 F.3d 757, 766 (6th Cir. 2011) (quoting *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834).

To establish the subjective component of an Eighth Amendment violation, a prisoner must demonstrate that the official acted with the requisite intent, that is, that he had a “sufficiently culpable state of mind.” *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834; *see also Wilson*, 501 U.S. at 297, 302-03. The plaintiff must show that the prison officials acted with “deliberate indifference” to a substantial risk that the prisoner would suffer serious harm. *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834; *Wilson*, 501 U.S. at 303; *Helling v. McKinney*, 509 U.S. at 32; *Woods v. Lecureux*, 110 F.3d 1215, 1222 (6th Cir. 1997); *Street*, 102 F.3d at 814; *Taylor v. Mich. Dep’t of Corr.*, 69 F.3d 76, 79 (6th Cir. 1995). “[D]eliberate indifference describes a state of mind more blameworthy than negligence.” *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 835. Thus,

[a] prison official cannot be found liable under the Eighth Amendment for denying an inmate humane conditions of confinement unless the official knows of and disregards an excessive risk to inmate health or safety; the official must both be aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that a substantial risk of serious harm exists, and he must also draw the inference. This approach comports best with the text of the Eighth Amendment as our cases have interpreted it. The Eighth Amendment does not outlaw cruel and unusual “conditions”; it outlaws cruel and unusual “punishments.” An act or omission unaccompanied by knowledge of a significant risk of harm might well be something society wishes to discourage, and if harm does result society might well wish to assure compensation. The common law reflects such concerns when it imposes tort liability on a purely objective basis. . . . But an official’s failure to alleviate a significant risk that he should have perceived but did not, while no cause for commendation, cannot under our cases be condemned as the infliction of punishment.

Id. at 837-38 (emphasis added; citations omitted); *see also Garretson v. City of Madison Heights*, 407 F.3d 789, 796 (6th Cir. 2005) (“If the officers failed to act in the face of an obvious risk of which they should have known but did not, then they did not violate the Fourteenth

Amendment.”). The subjective component must be evaluated for each defendant individually. *Bishop*, 636 F.3d at 767; *see also id.* at 768 (“[W]e must focus on whether each individual Deputy had the personal involvement necessary to permit a finding of subjective knowledge.”).

The complaint does not sufficiently allege that Defendants Smith and Colvin were aware, prior to the February 2015 stabbing, that inmate Campbell posed any significant risk of harm to Murphy. Murphy alleges that he was under the supervision of Smith and Colvin at the time, but he states only that he had continuously complained about Campbell to Defendants Holloway, Dickerson, and Yager through letters, request forms and grievances, explaining to each of them that Campbell was threatening to rob him and cut his throat. (ECF No. 1 at 4.) Murphy does not allege that he informed either Defendant Smith or Defendant Colvin that Campbell posed any specific threat.²

Murphy alleges that Defendant DeBerry acted with deliberate indifference when he allowed Campbell access to Murphy’s cell, where Campbell continued to issue threats against Murphy’s life. However, even if Defendant DeBerry was deliberately indifferent, Murphy alleges only that Campbell continued to threaten him. He does not allege that Campbell actually attacked him or attempted to attack him at any time after the stabbing on February 13, 2015. The fact that Murphy may have feared future additional injury does not satisfy the objective component of an Eighth Amendment violation. *See Wilson v. Yaklich*, 148 F.3d 596, 601 (6th Cir. 1998); *see also Osborne v. Little*, No. 3:07-1290, 2008 WL 4057093, at *2-3 (M.D. Tenn. Aug. 29, 2008).

² Murphy states that one month after he filed his grievance on April 22, 2015, “unit manager admits that the petitioner has been reporting he has been continuously threatened by this inmate.” (*Id.*) However, it is not clear whether this “admission” by Defendant Smith refers to reports Murphy may have made prior to the February stabbing or only to reports he made regarding Campbell’s ongoing threats after he was moved across the hall.

III. LEAVE TO AMEND

The Sixth Circuit has held that a district court may allow a prisoner to amend his complaint to avoid a *sua sponte* dismissal under the PLRA. *LaFountain v. Harry*, 716 F.3d 944, 951 (6th Cir. 2013); *see also Brown v. R.I.*, No. 12-1403, 2013 WL 646489, at *1 (1st Cir. Feb. 22, 2013) (per curiam) (“Ordinarily, before dismissal for failure to state a claim is ordered, some form of notice and an opportunity to cure the deficiencies in the complaint must be afforded.”). Leave to amend is not required where a deficiency cannot be cured. *Brown*, 2013 WL 646489, at *1; *Gonzalez-Gonzalez v. United States*, 257 F.3d 31, 37 (1st Cir. 2001) (“This does not mean, of course, that every *sua sponte* dismissal entered without prior notice to the plaintiff automatically must be reversed. If it is crystal clear that the plaintiff cannot prevail and that amending the complaint would be futile, then a *sua sponte* dismissal may stand.”); *Grayson v. Mayview State Hosp.*, 293 F.3d 103, 114 (3d Cir. 2002) (“*in forma pauperis* plaintiffs who file complaints subject to dismissal under Rule 12(b)(6) should receive leave to amend unless amendment would be inequitable or futile”); *Curley v. Perry*, 246 F.3d 1278, 1284 (10th Cir. 2001) (“We agree with the majority view that sua sponte dismissal of a meritless complaint that cannot be salvaged by amendment comports with due process and does not infringe the right of access to the courts.”). In this case, the Court cannot conclude that any amendment to Murphy’s complaint would be futile as a matter of law.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Court DISMISSES the complaint for failure to state a claim on which relief can be granted, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and 1915A(b)(1). However, leave to amend is GRANTED. Any amendment must be filed within thirty (30) days after the date of this order. Murphy is advised that an amended complaint supersedes the original complaint and must be

complete in itself without reference to the prior pleadings. The text of the complaint must allege sufficient facts to support each claim without reference to any extraneous document. Any exhibits must be identified by number in the text of the amended complaint and must be attached to the complaint. All claims alleged in an amended complaint must arise from the facts alleged in the original complaint or the first amended complaint. Each claim for relief must be stated in a separate count and must identify each defendant sued in that count. If Murphy fails to file an amended complaint within the time specified, the Court will assess a strike pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g) and enter judgment.

Murphy is reminded that he must promptly notify the Clerk, in writing, of any further change of address or extended absence.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

s/ **James D. Todd**
JAMES D. TODD
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE